



NELAC Fact Sheet for Federal Agencies

Q: What is NELAC?

A: The National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Conference (NELAC) is a cooperative association of States and Federal Agencies, formed to establish and promote mutually acceptable performance standards for the operation of environmental laboratories. The standards cover both analytical testing of environmental samples and the laboratory accreditation process. Private sector input to the process is obtained through a variety of mechanisms including open semiannual meetings, participation on NELAC committees, and through the Environmental Laboratory Advisory Board (ELAB), a federally chartered advisory committee with a balanced representation of the private sector that provides advice to EPA and NELAC. The goal of NELAC is to foster the generation of environmental laboratory data of known and acceptable quality on which to base public health and environmental management decisions.

Q: What is NELAP?

A: The National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Program (NELAP) is the program that implements the NELAC standards. States and Federal agencies serve as Accrediting Authorities with coordination facilitated by EPA to assure uniformity. Accreditation by one NELAP Accrediting Authority is mutually recognized by the other State and Federal Accrediting Authorities approved under NELAP. NELAP recognized 11 State programs as Accrediting Authorities in the summer of 1999. Additional states have begun preparing, or have already applied, for approval as Accrediting Authorities.

Q: How will NELAC benefit Federal Agencies?

A: NELAC benefits Federal Agencies by:

- Managing a uniform set of standards by which environmental data is produced across the various states, agencies and programs, thereby promoting comparability and defensibility.
- Being more cost effective, through the use of data by multiple stakeholders and the reduction in the number of assessments performed by federal accrediting authorities.
- Presenting greater opportunities for quality improvements. The NELAC standards development process encourages the pooling of expertise from multiple agencies, states and various groups in the private sector. This larger scope of expertise has strengthened the quality concepts and practices upon which the standards are based. Additional requirements for laboratory assessments will facilitate the expansion of the scope of accreditation programs and improve the abilities of the assessors, resulting in better assessments and ultimately better laboratories and data.
- Reducing the amount of effort needed to define project expectations and requirements. With an ever increasing number of laboratories and states participating in NELAP, baseline expectations for environmental projects will become more constant, resulting in more efficient communications regarding Data Quality Objectives and project deliverables.

Q: How does NELAC work?

A: States and federal agencies serve as the accrediting authorities. NELAP assessment teams composed of qualified USEPA, federal, and state personnel evaluate current and prospective accrediting authority programs for compliance with NELAC standards. Reciprocity among NELAP-approved accrediting authorities is mandatory.

Q: Where can I obtain more information on NELAC and a copy of the standards?

A: Information concerning NELAC, including the current standards, can be found at the NELAC web site address: <http://www.epa.gov/ttn/nelac>.

For further information, you may also contact:

Ms. Jeanne Hankins
NELAP Director
USEPA/ORD
3210 Hwy 54 (MD-75)
Research Triangle Park, NC 27711
T: (919) 541-1120
F: (919) 541-4261
E: hankins.jeanne@epa.gov

For microfiche or hardcopies of the NELAC standards, contact:

NTIS
5285 Port Royal Road
Springfield, VA 22161
T: 1-800-553-6847 or 703-605-6000
F: 703-605-6900
TDD: 703-487-4639
E: orders@ntis.fedworld.gov
I: <http://www.ntis.gov/ordernow>